1: Ammar E, I-5 (1951) 1954
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ancestry. Marriage outside the stock must be with those who can claim an equally holy descent.

The second important norm that governs the whole social structure is the weight and respect given to, and the authority wielded by, the person who plays the role of the senior, normally chosen on age basis as well as on capacity to speak and argue well, besides other factors such as economic status and social prestige. This pattern which, in the smallest unit, is the authority of the father is extended to the oldest capable member of the extended family, to the head of the clan, and to the village councils that congregate spontaneously, having no formal composition.

The third aspect which asserts itself in the various units of the social structure is the feeling of fellowship. The individual finds himself consciously or unconsciously merged into the group. Starting in this case with the largest unit of G'afra as a whole, one is not surprised to find that no elaborate electioneering campaign is required to persuade the G'afra villages to vote for the candidate who belongs to their stock. In fact, the same candidate for Silwa constituency (including the town of Edfu) has won the last three elections with a sweeping majority, irrespective of the political views of his opponents. Throughout the whole of Silwa region, the opposing candidate had never secured more than a hundred votes out of at least three thousand. The rule is that the people of Silwa should vote for their 'paternal cousin'. Yet in the last elections another candidate from the G'afra, the official holder of the ancestry register and a religious man whose grandfather was the leader in the mystic order of the village, stood for the elections to compete with the previous member [1] The reason for that, I was told, is that they once had a heated argument as to whose father was the more respected and honoured man amongst the G'afra. It was also generally believed that the new candidate was encouraged by the 'Ababda. The G'afra split their votes between the two, neither thereby winning the elections. This is strong evidence that kinship relations, and not party politics, decide the issue of the elections in this community.

On the clan level, the sentiment of fellowship shows itself in all the activities connected with the guest house. Suppose a distinguished guest has come to the guest house, e.g. a well-known religious man, or a man with social prestige from a neighbouring town; it is not only one man who receives him, but as many as possible of the heads of the extended families of the clan; and he might be invited by more than one clan. The money for the slain ram (dabiha) is collected from the heads of the families and called 'firda'-spread. The meal is cooked, each family providing its bread; meat and vegetables are provided from the 'common pot', and then they take their round trays to the guest house. The same happens with tea. Clan fellowship takes place during the night entertainments that are held

[1] In Silwa there is a strong connection between political authority and religious authority. This theme has been brought out clearly in E. Evans-Pritchard, *The Sanusi of Cyrenaica*, O.U.P., 1949.

'omda's house takes its place. All day long he is receiving petitioners or travellers, unless he is going the rounds with some official or inspecting his own fields. He pays frequent visits to the chief town of the district, either for business or for pleasure.

This uncontrolled system, though it has many advantages for the Government, is full of drawbacks for the fellah, abandoned as he is to a master who knows no more about administration than about justice. There are indeed exceptions, but they are as yet few. The system is also prejudicial to public security. Crimes may easily be concealed, or even foisted upon the innocent, by such an autocracy. Village feuds usually owe their origin and persistence to the rivalries aroused by this office.

At Nahyet el Barûd, in the *markaz* of Abu Tig, a new *'omda* was to be nominated. Among the candidates for the position two were outstanding, Sheikh Ahmed Abu Zeid and Sheikh Ahmed Farghali. One of these had been dismissed from the post by official action; the other, who had been *omda* in 1931, had also been dismissed by the Nessim Pasha Ministry. Both candidates were much feared in the district, and each had a large band of supporters. The committee which had to count the votes and then decide the election was formed of the *maamûr*, representatives of the neighbouring villages, and the *maazûn* of the village itself. However, the eligibility of the *maazûn*, as being a relative of one of the candidates, was challenged by the other. The authorities of the *markaz* then let it be known that the *maazûn* of another village would sit in his place. But on the day of the election, which was to be decided by a show of hands, it was seen that the first *maazûn* was still on the committee. His enemy's supporters objected, while his own friends upheld him, and the two parties came to blows. Worse than this, they made use of whatever weapons they could lay hands on, and a savage battle ensued. Before the police could intervene, three men had been killed and a number of others seriously wounded. The authorities arrested both candidates. The *mudîr* of Assiut gave orders that elections at Nahyet el Barûd and the neighbouring villages should be suspended until order was re-established (11th July, 1937).

Towards his superiors, whether officials or landlords, the fellah adopts an attitude of awesome respect, of servility

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should be declined by saying, 'God compensates me in a better way'.

The following three instances are concrete situations showing the working of the social structure. The first is the installation of a new corn mill by all the clans in the village to bring to an end the monopoly of the already existing privately owned mill. The rough estimates were divided into 24 kirats (parts), each section responsible for collecting the money equivalent to its 12 kirats.[1] In the second process of distribution, each section divides its share amongst the clans, and the head of each clan is responsible for collecting his share from family heads; by dividing his kirats into sahms, the people of his clan could buy a minimum of one-tenth of a sahm. No section or clan could be helped or its shares be taken by another. It was interesting to listen to the village crier calling out the names of the clans and the two sections, to induce haste in collecting the money.

Such procedure was followed for repairing the village mosque. In this case the question was not so much that of collecting money, as of recruiting the men to bring stone, water, straw, etc., for the repairs; and this was also dealt with on the same structural basis.

The third instance was the allocation of new building land to the village, which was also first divided into two sections; then each section was divided into equal parts amongst its clans, which in turn had to divide its share among the families.

The system of village government reflects a combination of central authority agents and the village social organization. The village head is an official called 'Omda' who used to be elected from a list of five people who own not less than 10 feddans. Two years ago, the law was changed and the Omda is now elected from amongst thirteen people who own enough land to make them eligible. The job is unpaid, and it is reckoned as a privilege to be elected. The Omda's seniority is something like the medieval *primus inter pares*. He represents the village on official occasions. One of his traditional and honorary functions is to receive guests, travellers, and government officials in his guest house. Silwa has also two unpaid 'Sheikhs' each representing one of the two sections of the village and thus commonly referred to as 'Sheikh hissa'; these are also elected from amongst those who are eligible (minimum requirement was 5 feddans, now being relaxed). The Omda and the two sheikhs settle the disputes that arise in the village, usually with the aid of Arab councils, or with the help of people whom they select on different occasions. Each sheikh is primarily concerned with the problems of his section (hissa).

The central government is represented by the police headquarters with a police officer or constable in charge and policemen and ghafeers. While the policemen are always from outside the village, the ghafeers are villagers, put up usually from different clans, acting as the Omda's messengers, as well as the local agents between the village and the police headquarters.

[1] The feddan has 24 kirats, and each kirat 12 sahms.

ever be allowed to die of hunger. The mutual help of the men in field-work and of the women in housework, the more readily given as poverty is greater, deserves every commendation. The way in which the fellaheen will work to accomplish something in the common interest, when they are not under orders, shows what they are capable of. Yet when land, a woman, or an *'omda* is in question, rival parties are established and the feud is kept up in every family from generation to generation. Everyone in the village has to take sides. Neutrals are despised. The antagonism, though usually latent, will show itself suddenly over some trivial matter, such as the shifting of a boundary mark, a theft of manure, or a *gamoossa* trespassing. Then human life counts for nothing, and death takes a holiday, especially in villages where there is Arab blood in the fellah's veins.

Thus life is lived in constant insecurity. To feel this, one must spend a night in a village. As soon as night falls precautions are taken against a possible foe. The cattle, including the camel if there is one, are brought indoors and shut in the house. The family also take refuge together behind the great closed door. The head of the house often stays outside watching his field or his water, for the enemy is always on the prowl. As the shadows deepen, the dogs begin to bark and gunshots become frequent.

The shots come not only from the unsleeping watchman, trying to reassure himself and everyone else, but also from fellaheen armed going in defiance of the law. During harvest the fellaheen become even more suspicious, and may be seen with a rifle slung over their shoulders as they stand with their feet in water to gather the last tufts of cotton.

In May 1936 the village of Qalandol was divided into two camps over the selection of an *'omda* — the friends of Mahmud Bakr on the one side, and those of Aly Abbas on the other. Mahmud Bakr made some slanderous remarks about his opponent, and one morning his son was found dead in the fields. A few days later the sister of Aly Abbas was stabbed as a reprisal. After that, for a whole year, both sides watched and waited. Neither work nor journeys were undertaken alone, but always in groups. One market day, when crowds of fellaheen had come from villages near, a young man of the party of Mahmud Bakr was insulted by an opponent, whom he struck. At once the supporters of Aly Abbas